

**Kevin Minor:** 0:02

Hey Bullseekers, and welcome to our Supplier Engagement Miniseries. I'm your host, Kevin Miner, and in this seven-part miniseries, I interview suppliers live at the 2023 NASPO Exchange in Salt Lake City, Utah. We discuss forming relationships and how to make the contracting process smoother. Today I'm talking with Nathan Fry, Managing Partner of ISG Public Sector. Give us a like and follow us wherever you get your podcasts and enjoy the show.

**Nathan Frey:** 0:37

Hi, my name is Nathan Fry and I'm the Managing Partner of ISG's Public Sector Practice. ISG is a global IT research and advisory firm and I lead the public sector practice of that. We are divided into areas that focus on research, but then also on consulting and delivery, and my team of professionals are dedicated to the public sector practice and we work regularly in state and local government across the United States. We also particularly for the NASPO community. We are one of the three providers on the IT research and advisory portfolio and in that covers really your traditional subscription research services and advisory or consulting services relative to related topics within our research portfolio.

**Kevin Minor:** 1:28

And that's actually a great segue into my first question, Nathan is. I just want to talk a little bit about relationships. How do you introduce yourself to a chief procurement officer and then how do you maintain those relationships with the procurement professional?

**Nathan Frey:** 1:47

Well, we mostly through events like the NASPO Exchange, we will cover these relationships and, of course, over our many years. We've been in practice for 25 years in the public sector space, so we've encountered a lot of the state procurement organizations through our normal channels but also through events like the NASPO Exchange Conference, where we're able to network one-on-one, meet new people that come into the market. Over 20 years there's been a lot of change in the space and who are those players? To meet those individuals, learn what their priorities are and to take that back and then work with that, as we're out in the market on a daily basis responding to procurements but also assisting procurement organizations with their services.

**Kevin Minor:** 2:36

Do you find, because you are involved you are already involved with NASPO and ValuePoint contracts that when you come to something like this, you kind of have a unique perspective?

**Nathan Frey:** 2:50

I think we do have a unique perspective just in that we understand kind of both sides of this relationship.

**Nathan Frey:** 2:56

Even though we are a supplier, we often work closely with the procurement organizations as they execute their roles.

**Nathan Frey:** 3:03

So we can see both sides in terms of our experience as sort of a customer of the procurement process, because we're responding to bids and proposals, negotiating statements of work for our own services.

**Nathan Frey:** 3:16

But we're also assisting those procurement professionals in the field as they are taking on a major say, it procurement where they may not have the specific subject matter expertise or they may just not have enough capacity at the moment to manage that solicitation. We can step in and support and assist that. So in meeting with other procurement professionals here at the NASPO Exchange, it is feeling like we're part of a community and yet we can learn from them what their priorities are, because that seems to be changing a lot here in recent days as

they prioritize ways to make procurements more efficient and effective for themselves, how they can target better cost effectiveness for their own constituents in state government. All those different aspects come into play and we're able to collaborate on some of those ideas, maybe throw out some things that we can't always say, in a procurement process. But here's something that we think might make the process better and we appreciate that opportunity to interact in a more casual setting but also something that's professional in terms of focus and timeliness of what we're all doing in the market.

**Kevin Minor:** 4:30

You know, speaking of inclusion, one of the really important parts of the process, on the state side anyway, is including the attorneys, especially more towards the beginning of the process. How do you successfully work with government attorneys?

**Nathan Frey:** 4:48

Well, as I mentioned before, a lot of our work in this space is procurement-related around technology projects.

**Nathan Frey:** 4:56

So in that process we are involved, often from the initial business case idea through a procurement strategy onward to the solicitation, evaluation and often even contract negotiation. So all along that way there's opportunities and probably the right place for legal to have input and participation. Now, although our primary point of contact often is the particular buyer or the procurement lead for that opportunity, we also keep an eye out for the areas where our experience says this could be a legal issue. It may be a term and condition, consideration of what's in the state's standard terms and conditions and policies, procedures all those things with an eye to look to the legal counsel and see where they should be involved and we would expect their input. So often that includes working with someone like the attorney general's office. Depending on how the state is structured, they might be contract attorneys within the contract management division, but those are all individuals that we would say okay, here is an opportunity where we think legal input is required and then we would turn to them for that advice.

**Kevin Minor:** 6:10

If there's one thing that you could say to state attorneys, just maybe a piece of helpful advice or suggestion, what would it be?

**Nathan Frey:** 6:20

I think it would be to keep an open mind about changes that are happening in the market, because an example would be a lot of our projects these days are going from systems that were previously on-premise to the cloud or software as a service and as we start to work with the procurement office we find that some of the standard terms and conditions or historical contract structures may not be consistent with the way the market is working in the cloud these days or how you're buying software on a subscription basis rather than a license basis.

**Nathan Frey:** 6:56

So often we try to invest time up front to talk with them about why these changes are relevant, why not adapting to that construct in the market may limit competition, it may drive prices higher.

**Nathan Frey:** 7:12

So I would just say, to keep that open mind, that things are changing. Now there are legitimately cases where state statute requires something particular that they may feel is non-negotiable and if that's the case we should prepare for that early in the procurement. We can state that in the procurement document, we can discuss it during the Q&A period and we can talk to procurement and the say agency customer about what impact that may have, who may choose not to bid or what may be the impacts on competition overall or this is going to drive up costs. So getting in front of those issues with the attorneys is one of the things we like to do. And the other thing I would say is, I believe as a professional in this space, we try to understand that they have a particular role and we're

supporting them. So it's not to usurp any of their authority or try to overrule something they believe is important, but yet we will work with them in a collaborative fashion to get to the ultimate goal for the state customer.

**Kevin Minor:** 8:21

Sure, that was an excellent answer, by the way. So, in keeping with that and you did touch on this a little bit, but in keeping with that, what is the best way for public procurement officials to educate you on the procurement process and on changes and updates? How do you want them to help you?

**Nathan Frey:** 8:43

Oh, that's good. That is a challenge because our firm has currently, I think, between active engagements, state term contracts, other cooperative agreements I think we have something like 35 different contracts and relationships in play at the moment. So keeping up with changes across 35 different organizations is certainly a challenge, and I do that partially as a team effort. I divide my staff up into kind of regions or areas of interest and we just watch the market for what's happening. Obviously, some changes in procurement organizations and structures are more broadly known than others, so we watch for those and try to stay on top of them, particularly in areas where we are currently doing business or where we may be thinking that there's a future opportunity there.

**Nathan Frey:** 9:37

But in more pragmatic fashion, one of the main ways I stay up to date is by going to the procurement website for whatever state or organization that is looking on there.

**Nathan Frey:** 9:49

Looking for current events section, notice of updates or it could be an FAQ area, is really one of the things I turn to most in terms of hey, if I've got this question, maybe someone else does. So we often look to those and ideally it would be truly questions that are frequently asked, not just the most basic things, but there are some states and organizations that have a real knowledge base of things that have come in common questions about the procurement process, who to contact, how to get help and I always enjoy those when I can search them and actually find my answer. But the one more thing I'll add to that is, if possible, an easy to find phone number so you can actually talk to a live person, because sometimes I might spend two or three hours searching a website for an answer that in my mind I know. If I could just speak to someone I'd get an answer quickly.

**Nathan Frey:** 10:49

It would be easy for them. I would have the answer and we could move on.

**Kevin Minor:** 10:53

Face-to-face, well, at least the human element, the human interaction, yeah.

**Nathan Frey:** 10:58

Yeah, interesting, and even if, in these times of staffing shortages, if that's not possible, even just a monitored email address. So submit a question, get a reply and maybe facilitate that conversation a bit in that way.

**Kevin Minor:** 11:13

Sure Got to start somewhere, right. Yeah, maybe that's how you get the phone number, that's right.

**Nathan Frey:** 11:20

Sometimes that is. Can I call you?

**Kevin Minor:** 11:22

Yeah, please, pretty, please, excellent. Nathan Fry, thank you so much for speaking with us today. We really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

**Nathan Frey:** 11:29  
Appreciate your time.

**Kevin Minor:** 11:33  
Thanks for stopping by today, Pollstakers. If you enjoyed this episode, we have many, many more resources. Just like it on our website. That's [naspoo.org](http://naspoo.org). Again, make sure you leave us a like, a follow, a comment. Whatever it is you do, I'm Kevin Miner. Until next time.